

Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity

Lessons:¹

First Lesson: Here beginneth the eighth Chapter of the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus.²

“Strive not with a mighty man, lest thou fall into his hands. Be not at variance with a rich man, lest he overweigh thee: for gold hath destroyed many, and perverted the hearts of kings. Strive not with a man that is full of tongue, and heap not wood upon his fire. Jest not with a rude man, lest thy ancestors be disgraced. Reproach not a man that turneth from sin, but remember that we are all worthy of punishment. Dishonour not a man in his old age: for even some of us wax old. Rejoice not over thy greatest enemy being dead, but remember that we die all. Despise not the discourse of the wise, but acquaint thyself with their proverbs: for of them thou shalt learn instruction, and how to serve great men with ease. Miss not the discourse of the elders: for they also learned of their fathers, and of them thou shalt learn understanding, and to give answer as need requireth.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the nineteenth verse of the second Chapter of the Second Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to Timothy.³

“. . . Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work. Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righ-

teousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”⁴ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Development:

1. We have been “saved” in Baptism, but....

Each of us was “saved” when he or she was baptized. I put “saved” in quotation marks because what that really means is that when each of us was baptized, we were joined to Our Saviour in a special way and, thanks to that sacramental joining, each of us acquired the ability to benefit from Our Lord’s one, full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.⁵

However, the fact that each of us has acquired that ability does not mean that each of us will make use of it, nor does it mean that those of us who try to use it will do so with sufficient skill, or with enough persistence, to benefit from it.

Just think: how many people have you known who were born with God-given talents and abilities who chose not to develop and use those capabilities? Sometimes that fail-

ure comes out of laziness, sometimes out of ignorance, sometimes out of lack of opportunity. However it comes, however, a world-class musical or athletic ability is utterly useless unless it is developed and applied to produce great performances.

Our ability to make use of what Christ has already done for us is a bit different from those mundane talents and abilities. For one thing, it is the job of the Church to make sure that no one is ignorant of this opportunity and this very sermon you are hearing at this moment is part of that effort. For another thing, once someone knows that this ability exists, he or she has the opportunity of developing it.

As just two examples, today's First and Second Lessons are just full of sound, practical advice on how to make use of this ability. This advice concerns simple but important choices such as avoiding useless arguments, restraining our natural corporeal impulses, developing an attitude of charity and humility toward others, and consciously seeking out good advice.

So while Jesus Christ died on the Cross to make it possible for each one of us to be saved, after baptism it is up to each one of us to work out that salvation in fear and trembling,⁶ that is, in humility and thankfulness.

2. This choice – to use or to ignore Christ's gift of salvation – is a simple one but it is one we all must make.

There are situations in life where we simply must make a choice and cannot evade it because the failure to act is the same as making a negative choice. In those cases, such as most invitations, our not saying "Yes" to an offered opportunity is the same as our saying "No" to it.

We might think of these situations as ones where action to accept or reject the offer is required because inaction

amounts to a rejection by default. God's invitation to us to join Him in salvation is one of those invitations that cannot be ignored.

One reason we cannot avoid taking action one way or the other on Christ's invitation to be joined to Him is that God always knows what we have done, or not done, in response to Him. As our Second Lesson tells us, "The Lord knoweth them that are his."⁷ So if we wish Him to know us, we must take care that we are numbered among those who are His. That means behaving like those who are His.

Conclusion:

The choice to do this is one that confronts us throughout the length of our lives as Christians. Even when I have once chosen to follow, and to align myself with, Christ, I may in effect revisit that choice and reverse it by the simple process of ceasing to behave and to live as a Christian. So it is really a constant, life-long process of positive choice, which is what St. Paul meant when he wrote, "Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling."⁸

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¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiv (PECUSA 1928/1943).

² *Ecclesiasticus* 8:1-9 (KJV).

³ II Timothy 2:19-26 (KJV).

⁴ II Timothy 2:19b (KJV).

⁵ *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 80 (PECUSA 1928/1943).

⁶ *Philippians* 2:12.

⁷ II Timothy 2:19a (KJV).

⁸ *Philippians* 2:12 (KJV).

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